

## THE VIEW FROM THE LOBBY

### Interview #12

Thursday, August 16, 1990

**RITCHIE:** I wanted to ask you again about your 1968 campaign for the Senate. Given all the things that happened to you in the 1964 campaign, what was it that made you decide to run again in 1968?

**ELSON:** A number of things. First of all, Carl Hayden wanted me to. After he saw how I handled myself during the '64 campaign, he really came about thinking I would be a good senator, if I could get elected. Even though in 1968 I had to go and offer his support to both Udalls again, both Stewart and Mo, mainly, he still thought they might have a better chance of being elected. But then the other one was Eugene Pulliam, who on the day after I had lost the '64 election, he came over and said, "If it's the last thing I do I will see you in the United States Senate." And then, I wanted to do it myself because I found out that I really enjoyed campaigning, and I felt I was really qualified. If anyone had been trained for the job, I think I had; and I think I would have made a very powerful one-two punch for Arizona had I been elected in '64. Can you imagine with Carl Hayden sitting here and my knowledge of the inner workings, and probably being able to get the committee assignments that I wanted, mainly because Carl Hayden sat on the Committee on Committees, or whatever we called it in those days.

And I think I told you, when I went to Arizona's first Boys' State, I got elected to the mock Senate. So my whole life I really thought I'd like to be like a Carl Hayden, and always wanted to be in the United States Senate. I learned right after I got back her that the only thing to be was one of them, if you really wanted to have an effect on things. You could be a very powerful staff member, which I think I was, and probably didn't recognize how much power I had when it was going on, but you're still a clerk. I don't care what they called you, staff director, administrative assistant, you're still hired by the Senate. I loved the pressure that you had of knowing that if you screwed up you could be through by the end of the day. It made you very cautious, and you did your homework pretty well.

Again, I'm digressing; but that whole time that I worked with the senator, I always knew that he could get information so much more rapidly than I could, that for me to get the same type of information I might have to do a lot of reading, talk to a lot of other staff people, check a lot of

things, where he could pick up the phone and call any cabinet member any time he wanted to, night or day, or the president of the United States. That sort of put you at a disadvantage, so you really worked pretty hard to make sure that you checked all your sources. But I loved that pressure of the game of wits, and being able to engage in that.

And even though it was such a horrible campaign in '64, in the sense of all the things that happened to me on the way to the forum, people now knew who I was. I had name recognition. I knew that we would probably get the Central Arizona Project authorized, and I hoped that I would get my fair share of the credit, because I was really the legman for the senator, went to all the conferences and negotiated things, and felt that I had played a major role in getting it authorized. But I think against a lot of my close political advisors I wanted to run. I realized the only way I could run again, without going back to the state and getting involved in starting all over again, and what would I do while I was doing all this, because I was not independently wealthy, never have been, never will be. I knew that my only chance, probably, of raising funds to make a race, either for the House or mainly for the Senate, was to be raising them while Carl Hayden was still here and I had a little bit of leverage. A lot of people had urged me to go slower, to say run for governor or run for one of the new House seats. But I had laid such a groundwork and had people in every county that I thought I could rely on in a new election attempt. And then the senator, as I say, as the time rolled on and it got closer, he tried to do things for me that would make it possible for me to run again and get the publicity. He let me be even more outspoken than I had become.

I guess the bottom line, is, I just wanted to do it. I wanted to be a senator. I think it's pretty rare for someone like myself, relatively unknown when I first got started, no financial resources, and yet having had this opportunity with Carl Hayden. I think anyone would have loved to have had the chance that I did to even run for the United States Senate and get the Democratic nomination. I was proud of that, both times. I felt very confident that I could win the nomination again in 1968, and I always knew that it would be Barry Goldwater that I would be running against, because Barry

—and I've got to give him credit for this—from the time he left the Senate in '64, after his abortive presidential bid, when he went back to Arizona I'll bet you that 275-80 days a year he was all over that state for those four years. I mean, every grade school, every high school, he didn't miss a beat to sit and talk to those kids and give his usual [expletive]. You know, talking about government, and the war, and he's such a charming individual, sort of a man's man, everyone was charmed. But he was everywhere.

When I was thinking about it as it approached the time to make a decision in the fall of '67, Lyndon was going to end the war in Vietnam any day, and there was always light at the end of the tunnel. If he had done that, if the war had ended and he ran again, which everyone thought he would, up until his shocking announcement, Arizona would have been an interesting situation, because Barry, although he has he name recognition, has always been a controversial figure. He originally won by the Eisenhower landslide, or he would never have been in the Senate in the first place. So he was always vulnerable to the right situation. For instance, there is no question in my mind, I think I would have beat him in '64 had he only been running for the United States Senate and hadn't gotten the nomination, because Lyndon would have carried the state by such a huge margin that I'm convinced that I could have done to Barry what he had done to Ernest McFarland. So when I made the decision to go ahead and move people, and raise money, in the fall of '67, it was on the basis that the war was going to end and Lyndon would be leading the ticket.

The picture that I showed you that was in the campaign flier was of President Johnson and me in the White House, just the two of us and the photographer. We were actually talking about the campaign and Arizona politics and the delegation to the convention and everything else. Of course, that was the week he announced he wasn't going to run. From the time I actually made the decision in the fall of '67 to the time he made his announcement, things weren't looking too good, but again, I had sort of committed myself, even though at the time of Johnson's announcement I had taken my advisors to Mexico, down to Acapulco for a high-level strategy session [laughs]—play session is more like it. They to a man all advised me that it was sort of a hopeless cause. They said it was still up to me if I wanted to run, they would all be there and they'd do what they could, but looking at things as they were at that particular moment, I was probably going to get my [expletive] beat rather badly.

Yet by this time I had raised money, moved some people to Arizona, my family was out in Arizona, everything was laid. And I think in the back of my mind I was saying: "It just can't keep going like this, I'll get a break somewhere along the line." It turned out that a break never did come. But I pretty much made the decision on my own to continue. I should have, I guess, known better, because I sort of knew that as the campaign went on, and as the Central Arizona Project was moving along, that I would probably be called back to work with the senator and some of the others in the struggle. And that's what happened. I'd be out in Arizona campaigning and the next thing I'd know I'd be called back. The senator didn't want to do it, but he felt that I had spent so much of my time doing what he wanted done that he would reluctantly suggest that maybe it would be best if I could get back for a couple of days. That would turn into a week. So it was pretty hard to do a decent campaign as it moved along. It just made planning impossible, fund raising impossible in many ways.

Then as the summer came along and you had the assassinations, it just seemed like it was getting deeper and deeper. And of course by then I had filed and was on the ballot. It just became a different type of nightmare than it was in '64 [laughs]. This time it just seemed like every time I'd feel optimistic about something that was going on, another happening would take place over which I had no control. That's a helpless feeling when you are running for public office, when you know damn well that there are circumstances that you can't control. But I still felt confident that I was going to get the nomination, and of course no one wanted to run because they knew Barry was running. So in many circles I became the sacrificial lamb, that's probably why I won the Democratic nomination by such a large majority [laughs], because no one wanted to get into the fight.

**RITCHIE:** Did you ever worry about those law suits?

**ELSON:** Coming up again? No, the reason for that was that first of all most of them were dismissed with prejudice or I got judgments on the pleadings. It turned out that the man who had brought most of them, he had been blackmailed himself, had homosexual tendencies and all, and had died. Of course, I anticipated that they might come up in the campaign, but the way they were all handled by the lawyers I had engaged for the senator and for me, we had pretty much put that aside. The call girl situation, since my wife stood by me, I wasn't fearful of that reappearing, though

another event happened in '67 [laughs]. But I felt I had all that under control, or a very good explanation, and sort of came out a hero on all that. So I wasn't fearful of any of that coming up again, though in any campaign any of your past can come back to haunt you in different ways, it just depends on the imagination of the people that are putting together their campaign against you.

Quite frankly, I don't know how I feel about it to this day, but I think the type of campaign I had run against Barry probably started a lot of the first negative campaigning, because I tried to make people laugh at him by using his own statements to play back at him. They were rather effective, but it was sort of negative in a —well, a cute negative campaigning. It was quite clever, I thought.

**RITCHIE:** One other question about that campaign: you had said earlier that in '64 you had a lot of trouble getting a campaign manager, and that you had really served as your own campaign manager. And in '67 you thought you had somebody on the staff who would play that role. But then he was appointed a judge. . .

**ELSON:** Well, he became first U.S. attorney.

**RITCHIE:** How did you happen to lose your primary candidate?

**ELSON:** His name was Ed Davis, he's now a very fine bankruptcy attorney. He left the bench and set up a private practice. He's an excellent attorney. In Ed's case, we had agreed to name someone else to be U.S. attorney, the senator had agreed to it, and then overnight Ed changed his mind. It really was like a low blow, but at the same time Ed had worked very hard for the senator and deserved the chance. The guy we were about to name was a close friend of Ed's, not that close a friend of mine. So he had to call the guy and tell him that a change had been made and he wanted it, which made things a little difficult among the three of us. And it was a little embarrassing to have to go back into the senator and tell him that we had changed, because when Carl Hayden gave his word on something, it was really something to get him to change his mind. He raised a lot of questions about the propriety of having told him that we would and not doing it. So it was a very delicate situation that way.

I think Ed wanted to do it because he saw it as a good opportunity. He wanted to go back home. And of course I wanted someone in the U.S. attorney's office that I could trust, not knowing what might come up again, and I sure didn't want to put someone unfriendly in the position, or recommend to the senator to put someone in there. It turned out that the guy who didn't get it became my campaign manager. Thought he had been in politics a lot, he didn't know where all the bodies were buried back here, particularly on fund raising. Again, I didn't have anyone really to raise money for me and I had to sort of do it myself. So some of the same flaws that I had in '64, I again had in 1968. And it's a mistake not to have someone that you can really trust and listen to and let them make all the nasty decisions and buffer you so you can be out campaigning. So it was not very well organized. I did use the same man in the same PR firm that I had used in Senator Hayden's '62 campaign, the same pollster, John Kraft, that I had used in '62 and '64. I had my heart in it, but it just seemed like this mountain was too steep and too high for me. I couldn't even get halfway to the second campsite the way things were going.

The thing that I really enjoyed about the '68 campaign, when I won the nomination and the campaign went on, I got to say about everything I wanted to say, but no one was particularly listening. I really enjoyed it that way, and I still have a lot of those speeches that we made, and we were way ahead of our time on environment, and industrial development, and city problems and all that. The biggest shock I think I had on that survey was that I had wanted to concentrate on metropolitan problems, because Phoenix and Tucson had grown so much, and this was the only political survey that I had ever seen that really startled me. We had a question on the urban problems, and no one felt they were an urban society, they still thought they were a little western town! So it was pretty hard to make that a big issue, when they still looked at themselves as a little country town.

After a while, I was just hoping that I could make it respectable and be able to at least walk away with my head high. Having lost a close one, and then losing respectably, I mean it was 57-43, I think the percentages were, if you are going to lose it's a lot easier to lose by a large majority than it is by a close one, because you are always haunted. To this day I am haunted about how a break here, a little more money, doing something a little differently, I would have been a United States senator. But I was, I think, a much better candidate in 1968 than I was in 1964, I was more

relaxed, I loved getting out in the circuit. I had one good one under me. I don't think unless you have done it yourself you really appreciate that, or some election where you're out rubbing hands, and under fire, and thinking on your feet.

I was very good at that, particularly in responding to questions, because after the years I had spent back here, there wasn't anything that I didn't know, or at least knew a little bit about the subject. That gives you a tremendous advantage over someone else in being current that way, and being able to reflect them. And among the press, if you're in a belligerent atmosphere, an adversarial atmosphere, you can always spot the one questioner who wants to really get you, and he's really an expert in the subject, you can finesse that pretty well because they're easy to spot. They want to make a statement and embarrass you. I became quite good on the give-and-take. I loved doing it that way, because I could turn it and expound on my own theories of government and how it works. So from that standpoint, I was, I think, a pretty good candidate.

**RITCHIE:** In general, did you think that the press gave you a fair shake?

**ELSON:** In '68? I think so, under the circumstances. Yeah, in fact a lot of them endorsed me. Of course, Pulliam endorsed both of us again, that sort of thing. I got pretty good coverage. The frustrating thing though, in that campaign, in running against a guy like Barry, just take Social Security matters. He wanted to do away with the system and make it a private insurance fund and all the other things. And you'd go to a place like Sun City, or Green Valley, these retirement communities, and they'd still love him. It didn't matter that he was going to wipe out their Society Security. You'd remind them of that, and he'd come out of those precincts with just huge majorities, and these were the elderly. I thought I could make some inroads there, but it didn't matter what he said. It's just like this inconsistency between rugged individualism, "we did it all by ourself in Arizona," and we had some of the biggest raids on the U.S. Treasury by Carl Hayden in the history of the country, while you have Barry Goldwater saying "we did it all alone." We'd quietly take it with our hand behind our back and attack the federal government on the other hand as being bad for the whole system. It just was a frustrating time.

**RITCHIE:** Well, when the dust settled and the election was over, and you had lost, and Hayden was retiring from the Senate, what did you anticipate you were going to do next?

**ELSON:** From that evening till I returned to Washington was another bad time in my life. My marriage was under great strain, mainly due to my liking women too much. I guess I developed a reputation as a womanizer—I don't like that word particularly but it probably fits. Then I was in debt. Again it doesn't sound like a lot of money in today's world, but I think it was something like \$90,000-\$100,000 in debt, and my friends who had signed the PR contracts and those sorts of things were on the line. I had to raise something like \$35,000 within sixty days or they were going to get sued. So again it was a hectic time. I didn't know what I wanted to do or what I was going to do. Then closing down Carl Hayden's office, I wanted to try to place all the people who had been working for him, and loyal to him, and trying to get them settled. So I was moving back and forth.

I did manage to meet the deadline and get my friends off the hook. The other \$45,000-\$50,000 it took me seven years to clean that up. The worst anyone did was 33 cents on the dollar. I remember sending the last check for \$1,800 to someone who I'm sure had written it off by then. But I didn't have any post-election fund raisers or anything like that. It was more from just talking to people and raising it. I raised—and so did Barry—a fair amount of money in Las Vegas. My brother was head of the FBI there all during the '60s, so through him I met a lot of the people around there. He would tell me who were the fairly clean guys, and who were the bad guys. He wouldn't say anything, he'd just introduce me and then he'd leave and I'd do my own talking.

There was a guy who owned the Dunes, by the name of Jake Gottlieb. He's now dead. He came out of Chicago, owned a trucking company and a lot of real estate, was very, very wealthy. I remember going to see Jake when I was trying to raise some funds, because he had helped before, and it was always cash. He looked at me and listened to my pleas, and he said, "Roy, do it like we do in Chicago. Just tell them to go to hell, you'll pay them when you can. I won't give you any money to help pay off your debt, that can wait, you've done your yeoman service and you can tell them to go you-know-where. But if you promise me it's for you, and for whatever you want to do, like to go into business, or go back to Arizona, I'll give you a half million interest-free

loan. When you can get around to repaying it, give it a try. If you don't. . ." It sort of sounds like one that President Bush's son [Neil] had. I don't know what was wrong with me, because I said, "I can't do that." He said, "That's the only way you'll get any more money from me." The tragedy of that is that shortly after that last visit with him, I saw him once again in Chicago, and then he came down with cancer and eventually died. If I had just taken him up on the offer it might have changed my life drastically, in the sense of being able to stay in politics, start a business, and I would never had had to pay the loan back. it would have been more of a gift than a loan. But I didn't. I don't know, maybe it was my Calvinistic upbringing, but I didn't think it was right. It was another one of my mistakes [laughs]. Anyhow, it would have changed things a lot.

**RITCHIE:** Speaking of your Calvinistic upbringing, this was the time that you managed to get your brother appointed chaplain of the Senate.

**ELSON:** Yeah.

**RITCHIE:** How did that come about?

**ELSON:** Well, I know my brother wanted to be, and of course it's like anything else around here, it's who you know and that sort of thing. Senator [John] Stennis wanted to nominate him, and did nominate him in the Democratic caucus. I really just told Edward that I would work on some of my Democratic friends, senators, particularly the Catholics and anyone that might have any doubts. So in between all this running around I did manage to make a few contacts. They all knew who he was, of course, and respected him. But I think I added a little to his getting a very big majority in the Democratic caucus, and he went on from there to become chaplain in the new Congress in '69.

**RITCHIE:** Sort of like the last patronage appointment from the Hayden office.

**ELSON:** Yeah [laughs]. And of course I did use the senator's name. I think I got the senator even to make a couple of calls. I felt good about that. And he was then chaplain for the next twelve years until the Republicans took over.

But as I say, that was a very bad period. I didn't know what I was going to do. I wanted to go back to Arizona, but I remember it's amazing once you lose, and closing down the senator's office, and we earlier in the year had been moving out a lot of his files, some to the Hayden Library but mainly to the mill in Tempe, and we were going to make the transfer later, after we made sure everything was in order, or that we were satisfied with the way they were going to take care of them. But it's amazing, overnight, when you have lost, or you are no longer in a position of power, how so-called friends disappear. I must admit that it came as a shock to me, because I thought I had some very good personal relationships with a lot of these people that represented organizations, the major corporations, labor unions and all that.

I remember so many of them telling me. "Well, Roy, with your experience and background, you'll have no problems." But when you told them that you were broke, didn't have a job, were in debt, and I was thinking of setting up a consulting business—which I eventually did when I got back later in the summer of '69—just overnight you're sort of gone and all the real or imagined hurts that you might have been involved in, or the grudges that people might have had, when you're down they like to make sure you're down for good. It's like putting the silver spike in. But it jolted me. I found out who some of my real friends were. I'm always surprised, every time I've been in difficulty, where a lot of times from those you least expect comes the greatest help, who remember things that you might have done accidentally just in the routine of things that were very important to them, but wasn't particularly to you, or you didn't think it was very important, it was just "sure, I'll do it." A lot of things have always happened to me that way, that when it looked the darkest, someone would come out. As I said, this was when my marriage started falling apart, all during this time. I moved the family back after we had sort of made a reconciliation and tried to set up a consulting business.

Starting out that way, I did some unusual things for some clients when I was desperate for having a client. Some of the big boys that I went to said, "We'll see what we can do," and then you'd never be able to reach them again. I remember some of those very specifically, and there's always a bend in the road. I'm not saying I'm vindictive, but I could be [laughs], if I ever had the chance. One of my clients late that summer or fall, I became a consultant to the National Association of Broadcasters. They had hired me only because they were doing some work on the copyright bill. A

guy that I knew who was down there in their government relations department had recommended me to them. He had been with the Communication Workers. So they hired me as a consultant. The rest of my business was sort of one-shot affairs. I was able to pick up enough to pay the mortgage, and feed the family, and keep the kids in school, and slowly start paying off some of the campaign debts. But it was a horrible period of time.

**RITCHIE:** Having been a Senate staff member for such a long period of time, how did the Senate and the Senate staff look to you when you were now on the outside trying to lobby for a copyright law and other things?

**ELSON:** Well, I remember once, it was right after I had lost. I was standing in the hall outside the senator's office and I ran into a guy who had been around for a long time by the name of Joe Miller. He was close to Maggie and Scoop's office, actually married a girl who worked for Scoop, I used to call him a "corridor creeper." I ran into him, and he reminded me of the story and said, "Well, you can join the rest of us corridor creepers now." Actually, the staff treated me pretty well, and members, too. I think they were very straightforward, and I think most of them respected me. Of course, a lot of them, particularly staff, were envious. I don't know whether that's the right word, but certainly I think they admired secretly that I had made the effort of something that they would like to have done themselves. I had good access to most of the senior staff and a lot of the members.

For instance, on my brother and the chaplain thing, there was some concern before the Democratic caucus and the actual vote about how Barry Goldwater might feel, coming back to the Senate, about my brother, after I had run against Barry. Of course, Barry said, "He's a friend of mine," meaning both Roy and my brother. He said, "That's no problem whatsoever. In fact, I'd like to second the nomination if you'll let me in the Democratic caucus."

I remember in those early days, some of Barry's people did hurt me when I thought I was coming up with a real good client. At the last minute I lost it, and then I found out why through a source. The Republican state committee woman from Texas, I think, shot me down, mainly because a former staff member of Barry's, who is still around as a lobbyist, told her she shouldn't hire anyone like me because Barry wouldn't

even let me in the office. Well, this really bothered me. This was early in '69. I thought if this was true, if Barry really feels that way, then boy I have some real problems; I might as well just get on the rail and get the hell out of town and go to some other country or some other state in the union if this were the case. I hadn't moved my family back from Arizona yet, so I was out in Arizona getting ready to do that when this all happened.

I called Barry at home, and I went out to see him at his home there in Phoenix. I explained what had happened. He said, "Come on, Roy, you know I'd never do anything like that." He was really pissed at the person who did it, and he called that woman in Texas who was on the board of this organization—and it would have been a super client for me—and told her, "Roy knows more about the workings of the Senate than anyone you could possibly hire. You'd be getting a good man. Just because he ran against me is no reason not to hire him. He's welcome in my office anytime." And he said this all in my presence. But the damage had already been done. They made a different selection. But it made me feel a lot better knowing that this was totally unauthorized by him, and unbeknownst to him. I was really much more relaxed after that, because that would have been really devastating to my livelihood or survival, but Barry is just not that type of person, and I appreciated it very much.

**RITCHIE:** You were unusual in that the two senators from your home state were both men you had run against.

**ELSON:** Yeah [laughs].

**RITCHIE:** And in the House you had Udall, who hadn't necessarily been in your corner.

**ELSON:** That's true, and I never got any help from any of them either, particularly. I got more help out of Barry than I ever did out of Fannin. I think my distaste for Paul probably showed through, and it was hard to be really polite. I just never had the respect for Senator Fannin as I did for Barry, and Barry the man and Fannin the man. Mo and I always seemed to get along. We got along much better than Stewart and I, but it made it very difficult. I know they were glad to see that I was probably politically dead and would not be a force to be reckoned with. We'd gotten the

Central Arizona Project authorized, so that was behind us. So I didn't get much help from anyone in our delegation, not that they had much to fear after that from me, because I had no power. Fortunately, in the business that I did get initially, they weren't on the committees that I dealt with as a lobbyist. So I really didn't have to deal with them that much.

**RITCHIE:** Did you focus on the Commerce Committee?

**ELSON:** Yeah, and the Judiciary Committee, particularly because of the copyright issue. Then subsequently when I went full-time with the National Association of Broadcasters, well, then it was the Commerce committees and a lot of other committees, and the Judiciary Committee, but I didn't run into the boys that much.

**RITCHIE:** Did you find dealing with Congress more frustrating from the outside? Trying to convince somebody of the rightness of your cause?

**ELSON:** Well, the way I looked at lobbying, and all the lobbyists I ever respected that I put in a class by themselves, and there were some good ones. Earle Clements was one of the best I ever saw. And there were a number of others like him. My approach to lobbying, when I became the chief lobbyist for the National Association of Broadcasters, was that I had a great respect for the members and the bodies themselves, so I was probably more of an advocate for them than I was for the association. I always felt that they should know both sides, as far as I knew it, what our issue was and why we thought it was, but I also let them know what they were going to hear from the other side. I just felt that was right. I believed in keeping those confidences in my relationship with individual members and staff. But I also believed in a lot of pounding the pavement.

And I never, ever, rarely, and I can't even think of one time, went around staff. If I couldn't work it out with staff, I'd ask to see the member with the staff person. I always remembered that I had the last shot at the old man when someone came to see me, and I wasn't going to make that mistake of aggravating the staff member. On occasion, when we couldn't agree, I'd ask the staff member: can we go see the member,

I'd like to have a shot at him. A lot of times they'd just say: go see the member. Or they'd say: why don't yo go take it up with the guy?

I found it frustrating in that it was all persuasion and there was no power. You had to figure out ways that you could bring some pressure to bear from grassroots or from other sources. Reaching Torby MacDonald, who was chairman of the House Communications Subcommittee, and Harley Staggers, was always a challenge because of a lot of things going on involving the networks, who had their own agendas a lot of times, and not necessarily those of the entire membership of the broadcasting industry. And the reason I left my consulting business and went full-time with the broadcasters quite frankly was I was bored. When I look back, having been around a lot of power, having been in campaigns, all the excitement of Capitol Hill, having run twice myself, then I couldn't believe you could make money—and I wasn't making a lot of money, but I was making more than I made on Capitol Hill—for doing nothing. When I started my consulting business I'll bet you I didn't work, if you really called it work, an hour a day. I thought, my God, what a racket! By, what a whoring job this is! I couldn't believe people would pay you for information that they could go get themselves if they really knew where to go and how to do it. I was just bored. I thought, God, I'm going to blow my brains out. I've got to do something. Sitting there and making a few phone calls and going to some silly meeting, or covering a hearing, I thought, gee whiz, they're paying me money for this?

First of all, I wasn't a very good businessman. I think I always sold myself short financially as far as working it out, I was never a very good advocate. I should have had a business manager or something. I could get the job done, but I wasn't very good at taking advantage, as a lot of my friends had, and a lot others I know, who I don't think had the background or the knowledge or the experience but had been very successful, so-called lawyers who are really lobbyists and have become very wealthy people as a result of this. I always wanted to stay small when I had my consulting. If I wanted to do anything with someone else, I wanted it sort of on a contract basis. I didn't want to build an organization and get tied down with running something like that.

But the real reason I went with the broadcasters was this emptiness of having had such an exciting time and things always happening and your mind just razor sharp

—well, for me it was razor sharp, it was probably a pretty dull razor—but I just couldn't get over it. Then everything was personally going on in my life at the same time, it just made it all even worse, in the sense of this lack of excitement, or of being able to control events, or to do anything. So when they asked me to join the broadcasters full-time, I thought about it a great deal; and I looked at all the industries that I might want to get involved with, that I had either worked with and all the other things, and I thought, well, actually, if there's any place in a private sector where I felt that there was a segment of our business world that could keep the government honest, and had a responsibility in public service, it would be the broadcasting industry, the way that the papers were failing, less readership, and television was taking over, and people were getting more and more of their information through those sources.

When I looked at them, besides networks of course, most of the members of that association, most broadcasters are really small businessmen who have roots in their community. I thought, gee, you could really develop a very powerful lobby if it was done right and you could really have a bearing. Again, I was thinking in terms of power, and that could be pretty exciting. And yet it was the one place that I thought, because they had to get their licenses from the FCC and they were supposed to be serving in the public interest, that this fit into my holding my nose as I might have, had I represented some of the corporate world that I had encountered from my years on the Hill, that I didn't like their selfish interest. And, of course, that was another misjudgment; because you find out that broadcasters were more interested in the bottom line than they were in their public service. That was a very great disappointment to me, and I could go on about that, but I think I did some very good work for them as long as I was with them, but I knew sooner or later that I couldn't last there either.

At one time or another I managed to irritate one or two of the networks, never all three at the same time, but I had good relations with most of the commissioners and knew a lot of them personally very well, and developed some very good rapport with both of the chairmen and subcommittee chairmen, as well as the ranking members of the committees.

**RITCHIE:** Didn't Dean Burch become chairman of the FCC at that time?

**ELSON:** Oh, Yes.

**RITCHIE:** Another Arizona connection, although not quite in your camp.

**ELSON:** No, and leaned more towards the cable interests at that time than he did broadcasting. But I knew all of them down there, and helped get a commissioner on there, like Joe Fogerty, who worked for [John] Pastore up here on the committee. But that's another long story.

**RITCHIE:** The FCC has always seemed to me more of a politically sensitive commission than a lot of the other regulatory commissions. Sam Rayburn had his nephew on the commission at one time.

**ELSON:** Oh, yeah, very sensitive politically. Christ, all you have to do is go back to the '50s when they were handing out the television licenses. How do you suppose Lyndon got his radio and television license in Austin? And Ernest McFarland got his, and a whole bunch of them. Yeah, they were always very politically sensitive. I guess what's always bothered me a little bit about government too is the closeness between the industries and the regulatory agencies. Of course, on the one hand you are trying to get people that are qualified to make judgments in this area to serve on these things, at the same time it's almost a revolving chair, they're going back into industry. So you want knowledgeable people, but I always noticed even when I was on the Hill, and certainly when I went into the private sector, there was always too much closeness between the regulatory agencies and the people they regulated. That included the banks and savings and loans—you talk about a closeness! Maybe the FCC was more visible because of television and radio, but I think there might be some other agencies that really had closer ties with the industry, where really where you drew the line was hard to see sometimes, it was a very sandy world.

And you worked, of course, at trying to influence those members. I always liked dealing one-on-one. I would take people to a lot of lunches, or we would meet for drinks or something like that, to get them away from their offices and the telephones and things like that. I guess I was sort of an old-fashioned lobbyist. Again, I could see the handwriting coming at me because I wasn't into doing all the high-pressure mass-mailings, all the PR, ads and the whole thing that it has become. The lobbying

industry is the biggest growth industry in the country, I think, certainly in Washington. I still believed in that personal contact, and the people that I had working for me, I told them that I expected them to spend eighty percent of their time creeping around—I mean walking around these corridors and seeking people, and staying on top of things, and only about twenty percent of their time sitting in the office filling out some damn report or writing things down.

I don't know in today's world, the way the big outfits now operate, with the huge budgets, I don't know whether they're any more effective. They're certainly a lot more expensive than some of the old-fashioned way. Though it seems like you are appealing to the masses to try to get something done, if you've got the information—a certain amount of it I'm sure has to be done, always had to be done, and was done, as you look back through the history. Lobbyists are necessary if you are going to get the information. We certainly, as I said before, relied on them heavily for getting their information, but we also tempered it our way after we checked it out. We expected it to be partial, certainly promoting their cause, but again it was trying to balance this. Having been sort of a child of the Hill myself, and then being a lobbyist trying to influence it, and trying to balance this because a lot of times I could understand their problems as well as they did, and a little more. I had a difficult time explaining it to our board or our president why you don't want to push him here, or you don't want to do this. Saying no to the people you are representing isn't necessarily easy and they don't always listen. Then they'll go do something stupid and they'll want you to go bail them out, because they hadn't listened to you in the first place. It was frustrating that way.

A big trade association like the National Association of Broadcasters, good old NAB, gave you the impression that the president of that organization had a difficult time, and he spent more time trying to keep the membership happy with their little requests for information or their convention and other stuff, rather than the real issues that confronted them. In trying to get them aroused on things that they should really be aroused about was sometimes not too successful. Then they'd get really aroused on the wrong issue, and think that that was the only thing that really mattered, when there were other things going on that would really hurt them much more, both financially and from the standpoint of what they were able to do, or could do.

**RITCHIE:** That was an era when the Nixon administration was squared off against the broadcasters.

**ELSON:** Yes, you're right. And they had [Clay] Whitehead down there as head of whatever they called it [Office of Telecommunications Policy] at the White House. One of the nicer men who I met during that time who has done very good work is Brian Lamb who heads up C-SPAN, put that all together. Very able guy. Then you had a CBS, what was his name? The number two man after [William] Paley who ran CBS.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, Frank Stanton.

**ELSON:** Yeah, and you know the thing over in the House.

**RITCHIE:** That's right, he was cited for contempt.

**ELSON:** Yeah, right, and they didn't play that one very smart. But anyhow, it was hard. I found myself though—this is interesting, after you go back to the Communications Act in the '30s and read all the background of that, the real reason why they set up the FCC was for the best interests of the broadcaster in the industry, because people were jamming, and frequencies weren't assigned, and it was sort of a mess. So in their own self-interest they agreed to be regulated and they'd serve in the public interest. But like a lot of things that went that way, regulatory agencies were set up really to sort of level the playing field or to protect those that already had their interests. That happened in the broadcasting industry. But I found myself sort of siding with the way the industry had developed, going back to the phonograph really, and radio. It was a lot of entrepreneurs that went in to develop broadcasting. It wasn't the government that had developed the industry, and it hadn't been subsidized by the government. When they set it up it certainly did protect a lot of interests, but otherwise you would have had chaos, if here wasn't some national regulatory agency, or an agency to oversee how this thing was going to function. Mainly it was an engineering one in the beginning, on the frequencies.

But I found myself actually sympathizing with their position, that they really were the entrepreneurs in the government, and so they paid a heavy price then when

it got into the convenience and necessity of saying that they can only do a certain amount of programming, and having to go through the license renewal process every five years, and all the other things. So intellectually I could support a lot of their position on that, even though I became disappointed later when all they really cared about, after they had all these licenses for all this time, what they really cared about was the bottom line. Now you have cable and all these things, but in those days the stations were like money machines, particularly a TV license. Then AM was the big thing then, and then FM developed; now FMs are the lucrative ones and AMs are the poor ones in the radio field, so you saw a big transition there. But, my God, the money that those things generated! It was incredible. It was like having a money machine. I wish I would have had one. Ernest McFarland, I think his station was worth seventy or eighty million dollars when he croaked. I hate to think what Lyndon's was until they finally got some more [stations] in there. It was a wonderful deal.

I found that for the most part I could support a lot of the first amendment stuff, that was easy to do. And a lot of the regulatory restrictions on advertising, you know, like when they lost cigarette advertising. That was all skillfully managed by old Earle Clements. He was the one who pulled that off really well, because he didn't want those counter-commercials. That was a beautiful lobbying job back in those days. It was masterminded really by Earle. But like the fight on saccharin, and then on copyright, and dealing with the Motion Picture Association, and the cable fight. As I mentioned, I was involved in that first fight way back in '56 when they failed to regulate cable at that time, and there was that big wonderful fight between Pastore and Kerr, and Yuma, Arizona, was the test case. But for the most part I found that I could honestly, in my own mind, support what I was arguing for, and worked at it pretty hard. In my own mind I was a very good lobbyist for the broadcasters.

I think I'm still a legend down there when it comes to expense accounts because I wouldn't get mine in right away and of course it was your own personal credit card, it wasn't their's, but by the time you got them in they would be quite large. We had a new comptroller who would always question them. Actually, I ended up losing money because I would forget taxi fares, and by the time I would fill them out I would have lost a receipt or something like that. A new chief financial officer came in who had been in the military, and he was sort of questioning my expenditures and didn't know what I did. I said, "Why don't you just pick a day and just go with me, and you can see

what I do. You pick a day, I don't care what it is, and I'll show you what I do." Well, finally he did. He picked a day, and I said, "Okay, you've got to meet me at eight o'clock in the morning because we're having a breakfast for a commissioner, and then we have to go to Capitol Hill and then back down to the Democratic Club over in the Watergate." He said, "I can't meet you for the eight o'clock breakfast, I'll meet you at nine." Well, I had him running all over! We had been up on the Hill, we met with the FCC, then we had a meeting with Lionel Van Deerlin, chairman of the subcommittee on communications at that time. Then we came over to the Senate side and saw [Ernest] Hollings and a couple of members over here, then we went back down to the FCC.

I had three fund raisers to go to that night, starting at five thirty, I think it was, two on Capitol Hill and one downtown. One at the Democratic Club, one at the Capitol Hill club, and then one at the Carlton Hotel downtown. Well, about eleven o'clock at night we were sitting in the lounge at the Carlton, now that everything is over, having some more drinks, and he's exhausted. I finally put him in a cab, he's half crooked; and I sent him home to his wife. I said, "I don't think you'd better drive, you'd better take a cab." I said, "Do you want to go with me tomorrow, I've got another eight o'clock." He said, no. Well, he didn't show up for three days. When he came back, from then on he was sort of an advocate. He said, "I don't know how Roy does it." Because I was in the office bright and bushy-tailed every morning and off again. From that moment on I never had any problems about my expense account.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned going to those fund raisers. Did you find as a lobbyist that a lot of people on Capitol Hill had their hands out for campaign contributions?

**ELSON:** Oh, God! In fact, I was the one who set up the PAC for the broadcasting industry. I hadn't been there but about six months or a year, and I saw how they were raising money for campaigns. They were going to the same people, a lot of it was under the table. First of all, you didn't get enough money that way, but they were always going to the big boys, and then by the time you got the check there was always a mix-up. The first time I wrote up a memorandum that somehow leaked to the trade press, but we brought it up at the board meeting down in Naples, Florida. I'll never forget it because I almost got my [expletive] fired for even suggesting that they set

up a political action committee. We're above doing anything like that, you know, we provide them with time—and you heard all this rationalization where they didn't want to come up with a penny for these candidates. In fact, they expunged the record that this was even discussed at this board meeting. But six months later at our June board meeting here in Washington it came up again. The plan was adopted by something like 35 to 2, and that's how we started. The reason I did it was trying to get some of the grassroots to build up some things.

But sure, I think my record for fund raisers in any one night was eight or nine. After a while that really became a chore, because they were going all the time. It's gotten much worse than it was in the '70s and early '80s when I was still doing that sort of thing. And you would end up seeing the same people. It was like: "I'll see you at the next one." The same lobbyists representing the same people, and we'd all be going to the same fund raisers. But you also wanted to be seen, and the reason that the PACS were effective was that you were able to deliver there at the door; and you were counted, and you were seen. What I felt sorry for, having had some experience myself in raising money, was the candidate. It's a lot easier when you're a staff person, doing it that way than the member himself. I've always thought it so degrading to have to go do it yourself, and still do. But man, the costs have gotten so out of hand that they went to them. But I think I went to as many as eight in one night. Say you had a drink at each one, you could build up a tolerance; and you could become an alcoholic and I'm not sure that I didn't for a while have some problems. I'd limit myself to one drink and go on, and sometimes I'd just drink soda and pretend.

But I used the fund raisers to pick up a lot of information, was very cognizant of who was there representing whom, and how much they had given. I'd try to make it an intelligence-gathering operation from my standpoint and pick up a lot of information, though it didn't necessarily apply to your problem, but it could affect some legislation that you're interested in because it was the same committee and it might get backed up and they were there for their own reasons, and their priority might be a little higher than yours. All that information helps. It's sort of like a computer, you put it back there and then figure out where things fall into place and what you might encounter down the line, particularly as a session is coming to an end. Again, I had mixed emotions. I sort of liked going to them, and then I sort of hated going to them, because you saw so many of the same people doing the same thing, and you'd end up

a lot of times talking to the same people every day. So I tried to make fun of it, and after a while if they were really bad I'd maybe have two drinks instead of one [laughs].

**RITCHIE:** Your broadcasters really made out on those things, though, because obviously the largest share of the money they contributed was going back to paying broadcasting advertising.

**ELSON:** Oh, yeah. Of course, I made several mistakes. Maybe I mentioned this to you before. I used to go to a lot of state association of broadcasting meetings; and I would have a speech, and I'd be on the program, sometimes it would be the whole thing, sometimes it would be a workshop, whatever. For a while there I was going out there and telling our members—which I thought was only the dutiful thing to do—if they knew how Washington worked, and I was here to tell them how it worked, they could save a lot of money in attorney's fees by either asking the member for some information or have them make the inquiry at the FCC, or use your public servants. I was doing this for quite a while, and then finally apparently one of the lawyers that was out there at the same thing, from the communications legal fraternity head one of my talks, I think it was out in Portland, Maine. I was making a big speech, and I was talking about a lot of stuff about big government and how you can help in all this. And the next thing I know, our president, Vince Wasilewski, who's a super guy and I got along with him really well, but he called me and said, "Roy, we may not be sending you on too many more state meetings, but when we do, I think you had better forget about the legal fraternity. You're hitting some people's pocketbooks. You know, they've had longstanding relationships with their clients." He did it very tactfully, but I certainly got the message [laughs]. And from then on I didn't go to too many state meetings unless I was specifically requested. But I thought that was funny.

**RITCHIE:** Did you find that there were certain senators who were more supportive than others, that you went back to? You mentioned Senator Hollings for instance.

**ELSON:** Yeah, but like anything else, you also knew that they had constituent problems. And I think with the politician you've got to tune your ear to hear what you're really hearing. That's when I think I started seeing changes that I mentioned in one of our earlier interviews. I became disenchanted with a number of members

who, when you thought you had their word, would double-deal you. As I said, they didn't have to give me their word or anything, and I normally made pretty sure of what I was hearing and asking, I think I had enough experience in that area. And when you went back to them, after say they went against you when they had told you they were going to support this, they would say, "Well, circumstances have changed. There was this difference and that." I would say, "No, the principle is still the same. Nothing's changed. You changed." I would go back and see them.

That's when I saw this "playing to the gallery" sort of thing, and not being very careful with what they said, or they wouldn't say anything if you pressed them. I could probably have been criticized, particularly as a businessman, and certainly maybe as a lobbyist, of not being a person of hard sell. I don't think I ever threaten anyone. If I did, it was so tactfully he probably missed it. We did go after some people politically that had doublecrossed us. And in most cases we were successful in seeing that they weren't around again. But that was rare. I spent a lot of time trying to cultivate those that were really against us, or appeared to be say more pro-cable, or more pro-motion picture, or whatever. I always figured that those were the people you had to work on the most, and again would try a long pool of just keeping them advised, staying in touch if they had any questions, and looking down the line that they might vote your way. And always hoping to have quick access.

I know on one battle, for instance, that I had lost in the committee on a tie vote. I remember all our people got all excited. I said, "I told you we were going to lose it, we weren't going to win it—we had a chance," but I said, "I guarantee you, when we get to the floor, that's all the votes they're going to get." And when it got to the floor, that's all the votes they got. I had laid out a good strategy and we had done our work real well. I think I proved my great worth at the time to the broadcasters on that issue, because we really had that nailed down. They only got eight votes.

But, I don't know about lobbying—I think I felt a little like a whore. After having worked for such a great man, and around such a great institution, and seeing some of the giants, even with all their shortcomings, at least all those people had been elected by the public, by their constituents. There's just something about—though I realize lobbying is necessary, essential and some are very, very fine, I also found some really cruddy people. Their ethics left much to be desired. It still bothers me to this day, I've

seen a lot of law firms for instance say on a tax bill where they might have a number of clients that they represent maybe on the same section of the bill, and actually sell out some of their clients, mainly because they can't take care of all of them, maybe not the same section of the bill, but in the same bill.

I might have mentioned about being at one meeting where we were waiting for the client. This is when I was representing the record companies and the industry. We had some PR people there, several big law firms; and one of the senior partners in a law firm came in before the client arrived and we were all sitting around, because we had all known each other, sort of BSing about everything. I remember his saying—and I remember who he said it to, distinctly too—to another partner in another law firm, he said, "Well, we ought to be able to keep this one alive for years." It disgusted me, because here we were there supposedly trying to figure out how to solve this client's problem, this was the Recording Industry of America, and what they were talking about was how do we keep this alive and get the fees?

That was near when I started to get burned out. This as after I had left the NAB and had gone back to consulting. It just sort of summed up what I saw going on in Washington among the so-called professional lobbyists and attorneys. There isn't a major law firm in this town, if they really had a code of ethics, that shouldn't be disbarred for their conflicts of interest. Then they farm them back and forth to each other. It's become a game. That's why I don't think much gets really done, because it has become such a game. As I say, there's nothing wrong with lobbying, but it shouldn't be practiced for the benefit of a certain profession, the lobbyists themselves.

**RITCHIE:** I've heard that people who used to work on Capitol Hill, when they become lobbyists, in the beginning they have all the contacts with people they had actually worked with, but the longer you lobby the fewer old associates are still left up on the Hill.

**ELSON:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** Is there sort of a shelf-life of a lobbyist?

**ELSON:** Well, yeah, except I've seen some like Horace Godfrey, who never really worked up here I don't think, but he was in the Kennedy administration and then represented the sugar people, one of the best lobbyists around. There are a number who worked at it and have done it over a period of time. But, sure, I would think there is, unless you really keep up, and you're pounding that pavement, and doing it, and working at it. I can think of a number that I would say have been able to maintain, or develop new contacts. But the Hill has changed so much, and people aren't staying around as long, and they're moving on quicker, and that's true downtown too in some of the agencies. I noticed when I was "traveling" that when I got back it was amazing to me just in say one Congress people moved on, and how someone else was running the show, or a new staff person was running the committee.

The other thing I might have mentioned is that having been a Democrat, the corporations and trade associations I think were very smart in hiring as top lobbyists for them a lot of Democrats, because mainly it was a Democratic Congress, and has been for so long, with minor exceptions. What fascinated me was that I soon found it was like that told saying, was it Ben Jonson? "When seen too often familiar with its face, we first endure, then pity, then embrace." All of a sudden you found all these good Democrats becoming the best conservatives and sort of right-wing fascists [laughs], and it bothered me. A lot of them, I wouldn't say all, but a lot of them took on the identity of the people that they were representing.

I can honestly say, I don't think I lost my own identity and what I believed in that way. Certainly I'm still probably a bomb-throwing socialist or whatever. Anyhow, I found that pretty amusing because I knew them all. But those who have been around for say the last fifteen or twenty years, that left here back when I left, and are still in their top positions, they don't enjoy it anymore. They're just putting in their time to get out, and it's like watching zombies. It's really sad to see what's happened to some of the brightest, ablest people, really good, to see how they're really burned out, and sort of cynical, and disgusted, and sold out, in a way, I guess that's what I mean. It's sad to see some of the. I won't name any of those names.

**RITCHIE:** But it's a type at least.

**ELSON:** Yeah. I don't think we finished yet. Can we maybe do it if I can get up in the morning?

**End of Interview #12**